

Rep. Slaughter leads Rules Debate on the Emergency Appropriations Authorization Bill- March 15, 2006

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Mr. Speaker, we are truly at a crossroads in the history of this nation.

Abroad, we are engaged in a war that, with each passing day, becomes more dangerous... just as our path to victory becomes more obscured.

At home, we are still dealing with the consequences of the colossal failure of this government to meet its most basic responsibility...to protect our citizens in a time of dire crisis.

It has been 7 months since Katrina devastated the Gulf coast, and thousands upon thousands of our fellow Americans are still depending on handouts to survive. They are without their homes, without their jobs, and without a sense of security.

And here in Washington, the principles of integrity, accountability and oversight, the cornerstone values of our democratic government, have been cast aside in favor of political expediency by our elected leadership.

The American people are losing faith in this government. They believe we are headed in the wrong direction, and they want change. It is not hard to see why.

How we ultimately address the challenges before us, as a government and as a people, will define the future of this nation, for better or worse.

In times like these, when we are so focused on what separates us from each other, it is critical that we remember that which binds us together - a commitment to the same core values and principals.

I think we can all agree that supporting our young men and women in uniform is a priority for each and every Member of this House - whether we are Democrats or Republicans, whether we have agreed with the Bush administration's reasons for going to war in Iraq or opposed them...

And just as we continue the age old debate on the proper role of government in our society, we should all agree that the kind of collapse we witnessed when this government failed to respond to hurricane Katrina can never, ever happen again.

We must renew our commitment to take responsibility for the safety and welfare of the American people in a time of crisis. And we must agree that government has a role in protecting not only the rights, but also the dignity and the humanity of every single American.

We cannot accept, nor should we be willing to tolerate, squalor, abject poverty, and needless suffering in the heart of America.

The defense of those who defend us abroad, and the protection of the defenseless here at home - these must be guiding principals which we all share.

M. Speaker, how should we go about turning these principals into action in the days and months ahead?

We may disagree on how to overcome the challenges that lay before us, just as our Founding Fathers hoped and expected we would. But all of us here are patriots, and all of us come to the table with our best intentions in mind.

And so, we must remember to always welcome debate, to keep this Floor open to all ideas and proposals, and to subject their merits equally to the rigors of the democratic process.

To pit the pursuance of an agenda against the perpetuation of our democratic traditions...that would be a true crime, and a true shame. And it has already been committed far too often here in this House.

And as we stand up for the principals of democracy here, we must also pledge to restore the second great tenet of our system of government: the integrity and accountability of our Congress.

We can no longer allow our leaders to be blinded by the politics of the moment, and forget their commitment to ethics and oversight. The short term gains may be tempting for those who hold the strings of power...but the long term consequences are devastating for the people of this nation - as we have already seen.

Ethics, Integrity and Accountability simply shouldn't have to be partisan issues. They should be issues of survival...because the very survival of our democratic system depends upon them.

It is on this point that I will ask my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to join me today in making a stand for our future.

During World War II, Harry Truman displayed a level of integrity and a strength of character that has become rare in today's Washington.

He dared to investigate his own party.

He held his fellow Democrats in Congress accountable for excessive and wasteful war contracts, and he provided a mechanism for accountability and oversight during an unprecedented war effort that saved taxpayers millions of dollars. It was called the Truman Commission.

The Commission's purpose was to maximize every dollar we had to spend, to ferret out corruption and mismanagement, and to infuse a sense of accountability into the American war machine. The Commission's success saved many American lives by ensuring that our tax dollars were spent on what was important: by ensuring they were spent on winning the war.

And yet we in this Congress have not yet had the courage to insist on the same level of accountability today that President Truman saw fit to employ over 60 years ago -

Despite the fact that at least \$9 billion of money spent on Iraqi reconstruction has been unaccounted for...

And despite the fact that Pentagon contracts for body armor have gone to companies that have never produced it...

...while 80% of the American Marines lost in Iraq to upper-body wounds could have been saved if those brave soldiers had only been provided with the right armor.

Nor have we expressed the needed commitment to truly investigate our nation's response to the second great failure of our time: Hurricane Katrina...

Once again, despite the poor planning, the misused resources, the homes and relief that has still yet to reach those who need it....

The question I have for my colleagues today is, where is our bravery? Where is our commitment to those we protect, and to those who protect us?

It is a question that I hope my colleagues who plan to vote for this rule will answer definitively here today.

When we squander precious resources, when we waste time we do not have, and when we fail to hold ourselves accountable...we sacrifice American lives. And when we refuse to insist upon integrity, oversight and accountability in our

own government, we undermine our very democracy...in a time when we are trying to spread it abroad.

But today we have an opportunity to begin anew and follow the proud tradition of some of America's greatest past leaders.

We have before us a Democratic proposal to create an oversight commission...one which will ensure that the billions of dollars being spent on the war in Iraq and on the rebuilding of New Orleans and the gulf coast are not lost in the black hole of corruption, cronyism and no bid contracts.

We have an opportunity to restore checks and balances to our system of government and provide the accountability and oversight which it is our responsibility in this Congress to provide.

And just like in Harry Truman's day- that responsibility transcends the politics of Republican and Democrat. Rather, it speaks to our willingness to preserve the fundamental values of our democratic system.

And so I strongly urge my colleagues, as we prepare to spend 91.7 billion in taxpayer dollars, to vote against this rule, and in favor of the previous question, which will allow consideration of an amendment to create a new Truman Commission and restore a measure of integrity, accountability and oversight to this government- values which have been sorely lacking in this government of late and are so greatly missed.

